

Dining gets 'Revolution'-ized

New restaurant looks to inspire customers with unique experience

Barbara Lanigan
Torch Staff Writer

Entrepreneur Mike Leeson's vision for saluting America's greatness will soon be realized with the opening of his new restaurant, Industrial Revolution Eatery and Grille on the corner of U.S. 30 and Linwood Ave. in Valparaiso.

Leeson captured the essence of a bygone era with a tribute to working class Americans and military personnel, past and present. The anticipated opening will take place the fourth week of April, welcoming guests with music from the early 1900s and a building full of nostalgic design.

Approximately 26 television screens are placed throughout the eatery, including seven in the bar that will play sports or other programs chosen by customers. Dining

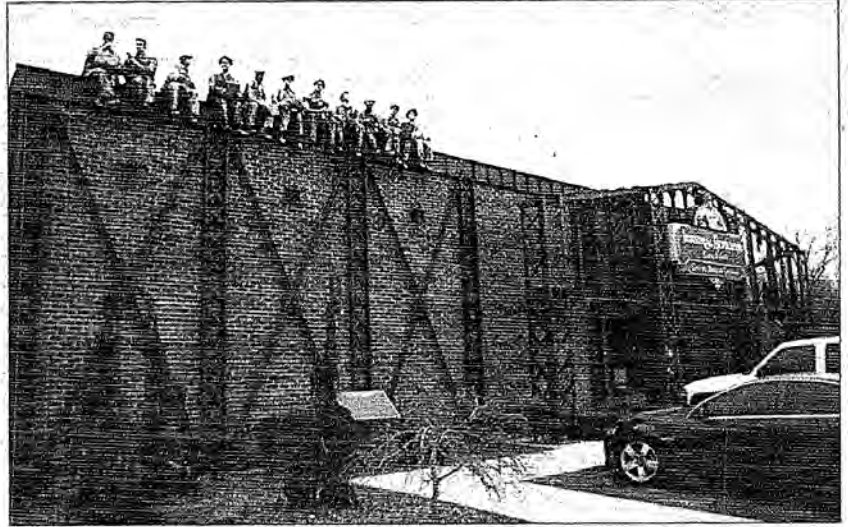
room screens will play varied biographies and educational material from the turn of the century - including episodes of "Modern Marvels." The women's bathroom has a screen playing episodes of "I Love Lucy," while the male bathroom screen boasts episodes of "The Three Stooges."

Chef Javier Fuentes has helped in the menu development focusing on homemade, classic and signature dishes including stuffed burgers, vintage pot roast, meatloaf, steaks, salads and a "rusty" signature BBQ sauce.

Guests will also be entertained by a steel fabricated train suspended from the ceiling. Customers can watch as their food is prepared through the open concept grille area of the kitchen, including a brick oven. Other features include the actual wrenches that were used in connecting the steel beams throughout the building, which are affixed to the bathroom doors as decorative handles.

"Nothing came out of the box," Leeson said.

Everything has been custom-made, from the distressed wood tables and booths, and the reclaimed



Kyle Whitgrove / The Torch

The Industrial Revolution is a new restaurant off of Highway 30 in Valparaiso. Its exterior pays tribute to the working American class.

hardwood floors to the copper tin on the ceilings.

The exposed steel beams have purposely been rusted and then clear coated to represent an aged, distinct look, which is a unique chemical process that Leeson's company, Synergy Steel Structures, Inc., created.

As the owner of a steel company, Leeson has had firsthand experience with the changes in the steel industry during the current economic downturn. Leeson said that he has seen a decline in business in the past year and a half, and that the outlook did not look good, prompting him to think of different concepts to use his steel product in more architectural ways.

"People use steel as a purpose, but there's other benefits to it; to me, they're aesthetic. You can make a lot of cool things out of steel," Leeson said.

Leeson said that people thought it was a bad economic time to make a leap into the unknown.

This is a concept that is going a little bit against the grain; never before have I seen an industrial element being pulled into a mid- or upscale range style of a restaurant.

Mike Leeson
Owner

"This is a concept that is going a little bit against the grain; never before have I seen an industrial element being pulled into a mid- or upscale range style of a restaurant," Leeson said.

Leeson said that the restaurant name may imply a direct comparison to the Industrial Revolution time period but wanted to clarify the broader meaning of revolutionizing restaurant concepts that have to do with industry. He feels that the middle class has been

dwindling in America, and unemployment is a reflection of some changes happening in the country.

"We cannot continue to be the superpower of the world if we're not producing our own goods and services; at some point if we're outsourcing everything, we're in trouble," Leeson said.

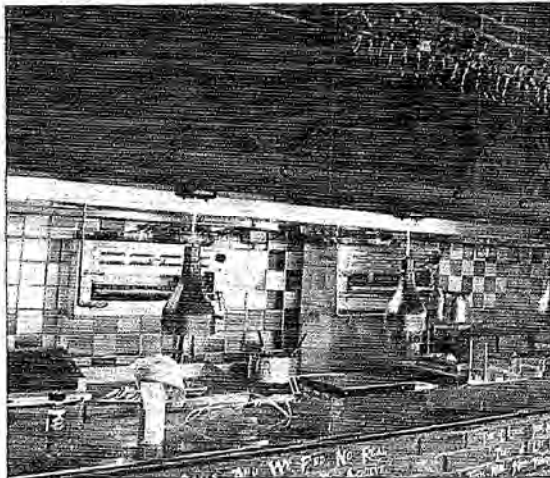
Hand-painted motivational quotes adorn the 100-year-old "misfit clinker" bricks on the walls that Leeson hopes will add to the inspirational experience.

"Ultimately, I just hope people are motivated and inspired with the concept and really like it and leave here with an experience they can't get at any other restaurant," Leeson said.

Junior Jessica Alvarez said she has seen the outside of the restaurant and likes how they've changed the appearance of the structure.

"I think it looks really, really nice," Alvarez said. "I'm excited about it opening."

Contact Barbara Lanigan at torch@valpo.edu.



Kyle Whitgrove / The Torch

The dining area offers an innovative eating experience, combining elements of past and future.

The Times 7/7/2010

Valparaiso Community Improvement Awards

Jon L. Hendricks

Valparaiso — Mike Leeson, owner of the Industrial Revolution Eatery, accepts his Community Improvement Award for the new restaurant on U.S. 30 during an award ceremony at the Valparaiso University Harre Union Wednesday, July 7, 2010.

